

'Never forget children,' UNICEF warns of escalating violence in Central African Republic

At least 350,000 children in the Central African Republic (CAR) are out of school and lack access to health and other basic services, including nearly 29,000 who have fled escalating violence this year, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has warned, urging warring parties to stop the fighting.

"Children are [paying the highest price](#) for this new surge of violence," UNICEF Regional Director for West and Central Africa, Marie-Pierre Poirier, said over the weekend, adding: "All actors should stop violence against children now. The world must not forget the children of the Central African Republic. Protection of children should come first."

The already precarious humanitarian and security situation in the country has deteriorated over the past year, worsening even further since the start of 2018. An estimated 687,400 people are displaced within the country, up from 440,000 in 2017, including more than 357,400 children.

This year alone, at least 55,000 people – including 28,600 children – have fled their homes because of escalating brutality and violence.

UNICEF said that a third of children are currently out of school. Close to half of all children are not fully immunized and 41 per cent of children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition.

The agency is providing children with life-saving assistance. "UNICEF and our partners are achieving encouraging results focusing on four key priorities: scaling up immunization, ending malnutrition, providing education, and protection; including in emergency situations," said Ms. Poirier.

In 2017, UNICEF and partners vaccinated more than 800,000 children under-five against polio, representing 98 per cent coverage, and treated more than 26,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition.

Also last year, UNICEF supported the release of 2,969 children from armed groups, and helped set up 315 child-friendly and temporary learning spaces in displacement camps, helping around 56,600 children.

However, up to the end of April, only 15 per cent of UNICEF's 2018 humanitarian appeal for the country has been funded. The agency needs an additional \$48 million.

"With significant investment in targeted interventions, we can make a real difference for children both in internally displaced sites and host communities," said Ms. Poirier.

Preventive action could save billions of dollars in food assistance costs – UN agency

As chronic hunger increase and food crises intensify worldwide, preventative actions and investments in addressing their causes could result in savings worth billions of dollars, a new United Nations report has found.

As an example, an end to conflict in Syria and Yemen alone could save over \$500 million a year.

According to the UN [World Food Programme](#) (WFP), while ending conflict is crucial, making national and local systems of relief more robust, is equally important.

“Preventing food crises also requires [long-term investment in education](#), infrastructure and economic growth,” said Steven Were Omamo, the Chief of Food Systems at WFP.

“While increases in per capita income help countries limit the scale of food crises, even low-income countries can prevent crises by making these investments.”

In its report entitled [World Food Assistance: Preventing Food Crises](#), WFP makes the case for tackling the root causes of food crises – not just conflict, but climate shocks, chronic hunger and malnutrition; poorly functioning food systems; and flawed political, social and economic structures.

For example, helping countries and communities better manage the risks posed by natural disasters – especially those related to climate change – as well as reducing displacement, could yield potential savings of close to \$1 billion.

Concerted action could lower the agency’s costs by more than \$5 billion, the report noted.

“In other words, there would be virtually no need for food assistance and the money saved could be spent on longer-term developmental initiatives to improve the lives of the most vulnerable,” said WFP.

Iraqis vote in first election since ISIL defeat; UN chief hails polls as progress on path to stronger democracy

[United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres](#) has congratulated the people of Iraq on the holding yesterday of the first national parliamentary elections since the country declared victory over Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Dae'sh) terrorists late last year.

"Following the military defeat of Dae'sh, the elections represent [further progress](#) in building a stronger Iraqi democracy," Mr. Guterres said in a statement issued Sunday by a UN spokesperson.

According to media reports, nearly 7,000 candidates from 87 parties competed against one another in the polls. The UN provided technical assistance to Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC).

The Secretary-General saluted the tireless efforts of electoral officials, party agents and the security forces in making the elections largely peaceful and orderly.

"He commends all Iraqis who took part, in particular those internally displaced persons who cast their ballots despite their difficult conditions," said the statement.

Calling on all Iraqi political actors and their supporters to uphold peace as the results are processed, the UN chief further urged political actors to resolve any electoral disputes through established legal channels and to complete the electoral process by forming an inclusive government as soon as possible.

"The United Nations remains committed to supporting the Government and people of Iraq in this endeavor," the statement concluded.

Ahead of the elections, Ján Kubiš, head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq ([UNAMI](#)), [called on all Iraqis](#), including in the Kurdistan Region, to come together to strengthen fully sovereign, united, democratic and federal Iraq.

"Since the last elections four years ago, Iraq faced the worst assault by the terrorist Dae'sh, which has committed untold atrocities. Today, with Dae'sh's structures defeated, and the country liberated, it is your opportunity to consolidate this historic victory that was won with the blood of the martyrs and the unity and perseverance of the people, and embark on a new beginning," he said last Thursday.

On Saturday, Mr. Kubiš visited several polling stations in Fallujah, west of the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, describing the process very orderly and saying that he was very impressed to see the numbers of people, especially women, headed to vote.

[UN chief condemns ‘appalling’ terrorist attacks on churches in Indonesian port city](#)

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has condemned the wave of suicide attacks earlier today on worshipers at three churches in Surabaya, Indonesia, the country’s second largest city.

“He is [appalled](#) at reports that children were used to participate in the attacks,” said Mr. Guterres’ spokesman in a statement on the incidents, which reportedly left at least a dozen people dead and twice as many injured.

Media reports suggest that suicide bombers, including four children, one as young as nine years old, used motorcycles and a truck in what appeared to be a coordinated assault on the three churches. The attacks occurred Sunday as parishioners were heading to morning services.

Indonesian authorities reportedly foiled attacks on other churches in the sprawling port city.

“The Secretary-General expresses his condolences to the families of the victims and wishes a swift recovery to those injured,” said the UN spokesman’s statement.

He added that Mr. Guterres reiterates the support of the United Nations to the Government and people of Indonesia in their efforts to fight and prevent terrorism and violent extremism, including through the promotion of pluralism, moderation and tolerance.

[Save our planet by protecting migratory birds and their ‘epic](#)

journeys, ' urges UN chief

As they make their global journeys, migratory birds not only set birdwatchers' binoculars agog, they also help the planet maintain its essential ecological balance.

That's one of the key messages from United Nations chief Antonio Guterres, for [World Migratory Bird Day](#), celebrated on Saturday, with the soaring message: "Unifying Our Voices for Bird Conservation."

"Migratory birds connect people, ecosystems and nations. They [are symbols of peace](#) and of an interconnected planet," [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said in a statement to mark the Day.

"Their epic journeys inspire people of all ages, across the globe," he continued, adding: "World Migratory Bird Day is an opportunity to celebrate the great natural wonder of bird migration – but also a reminder that those patterns, and ecosystems worldwide, are threatened by climate change."

The Day highlights the need to [conserve migratory birds](#) and their habitats by raising awareness of the threats they face, their ecological importance and the need for international cooperation to conserve them.

Migratory birds fly hundreds and thousands of kilometres, along historic routes, to find the best habitats available for feeding, breeding and raising their young. The perilous journeys involve a wide and diverse array of threats.

Of the 11,000-bird species on the planet, one-in-five is considered migratory. Forty per cent of them are in decline, with one-in-eight under threat of global extinction. Major threats include habitat-loss and degradation, caused by agricultural and coastal development; collision with badly placed wind turbines and powerlines; unsustainable harvesting, and illegal killing and taking.

Migratory birds are also greatly affected by poisoning, such as through ingesting lead released into the environment, through spent ammunition, or toxic weights used for fishing.

"Migratory [birds are under threat](#) from every corner: they are losing their habitats, subjected to illegal killing and suffering from the impacts of climate change," said Erik Solheim, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme, [UNEP](#), adding that we all have a responsibility to "save such a precious component of the natural world."

By protecting them, we protect our planet.

Key supporters and partners globally, are adamant that successful migratory bird conservation can only be achieved through a united effort.

Beginning this year, World Migratory Bird Day will be observed annually each May and October, to coincide with the cycle of migration, making it possible to organize events in countries around the world at peak migration times.

“I urge Governments and people everywhere to take concerted conservation action that will help to ensure the birds’ survival – and our own,” the Secretary-General concluded.